

*The crisis in Lebanon is the crisis of the Middle East in microcosm.*

## Identity: Lebanon

A 16mm sound film or videocassette—25 minutes



*The religious and civil dissension that has beset Lebanon since the withdrawal of the French in 1946 began with the enactment of the so-called “National Pact”—a power-sharing agreement that favored the then-majority Maronite Christians and ignored the real potential for a Muslim majority. The divisions among Muslims and Christians and sects in between, the division regarding the cause of the Palestinians, the disparate views on Lebanon’s identity and destiny—all inform the history of Lebanon since World War II, a history in microcosm of the Middle East’s identity crisis.*

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# Identity

- Focuses on the pluralistic, strife-ridden nation of Lebanon—a microcosm of the Middle East's identity crisis.
- Discusses the repercussions of the so-called “National Pact” of 1943—a power-sharing formula responsible for much of Lebanon's recent turmoil.
- Tracks the shift of power between Christians and Muslims after World War II, and analyzes the political and religious divisions that effected two civil wars.
- Examines the stateless plight of the Palestinians, and how their cause further divided Lebanese society.



## Content Summary

If competing ideologies and national or ethnic allegiances have fostered an identity crisis in the Middle East, it is a crisis most keenly felt in Lebanon, where all manner of minority groups, political organizations, religious sects, and foreign troops vie for power and territory.

Although Lebanon has never been without turmoil, the latest episode began in 1943 when representatives of various groups drew up the so-called “National Pact”—a proportional power-sharing formula based on 1932 census data. The National Pact reaffirmed the power of Lebanon's Maronite Christian majority (a majority by virtue of the fact that the French had carved out the Christian enclave of Lebanon from the mandated Syrian territory), but, based on outdated census data, it overlooked the potential for a Muslim majority.

Despite its flaws, the National Pact granted valued concessions to the Sunni and Shi'i Muslims and the Druze and thus effected a temporary truce between Muslims and Christians. But the new Maronite government soon proved incapable of governing, and the traditionally divisive aspects of Lebanese politics and society quickly re-emerged.

The “Rose Water Revolution” of 1952 (so called because its effects were so mild) widened the gap between Muslims and Christians. While the Sunni Muslims wished to make Lebanon an influential Arab province of Greater Syria, the Maronite Christians, suspicious of Islam and the budding pan-Arab movements of the 1950s, emphasized their Phoenician ancestry and Mediterranean heritage as culturally and ethnically distinct from the Arabs. Then the Druze, the Shi'i Muslims, and Christian sects other than the Maronite joined the fray, each with a different perspective on Lebanon's identity. New ideologies—nationalism, socialism, but especially Nasserism—added to Lebanon's mounting identity crisis. And Muslims, their population swelled by thousands of Palestinian refugees, clamored for a revision of the National Pact formula to confirm their majority status.

Although civil war erupted in the summer of 1958, American troops soon helped to arrange a cease-fire. By October, plans were underway for an emergency “salvation cabinet” that would, when implemented,

equally divide government posts between Muslims and Christians. This arrangement ended the fighting and allowed the withdrawal of American troops, but very little changed after the war's end. In the next several years power changed hands between those who sought to preserve the status quo and those who sought change on behalf of their religious alliance. Meanwhile, Lebanon's population boomed and the economy duly prospered.

Throughout the 1960s, the Palestinian issue simmered beneath the surface. Dominant Christian governments refused to grant citizenship to the three hundred thousand non-Lebanese refugees, and after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War the Palestinians used Lebanon as a base in their border confrontations with Israel.

Attacks and reprisals across the Lebanese-Israeli border divided those Lebanese who supported and opposed the Palestinian cause, and civil war erupted once more in 1975. Religious groups divided their support, and external matters such as PLO involvement confused matters all the more. In addition to religious and nationalist issues, the civil war focused on economic class gaps and varied political ideologies vying for influence.

War raged for more than a year and a half. Although a cease-fire was finally arranged when the war threatened to spread to Israel and nearby Arab states, losses were great: thousands of casualties, hundreds of thousands left homeless, and billions of dollars in property damage.

Unfortunately, peace was short-lived. Israeli forces and the PLO have fought ever since, and Israel has twice sent its troops into Lebanon. There they remain beside Syrian forces and smaller armies of the rival religious factions.



# The Middle East Series

## **The Middlemen: The Pivotal Role of the Middle East** (color no. 4001)

At the center of the known world for centuries, the Middle East was a geographical, commercial, ethnic, and religious crossroads. And Middle Easterners were the world's "middlemen"—an ethnocultural blend of the elements of which illuminate both the Middle Eastern sensibility and the region's current instability.

## **The Torchbearers: Bridging the Dark Ages** (color no. 4002)

Coincident with the Dark Ages in Europe, Islamic civilization in the Middle East reached its peak. Had Middle Eastern scholars not rediscovered, synthesized, and advanced the knowledge of antiquity, thus laying the groundwork for further exploration and discovery, the European Renaissance and Western civilization as we now know it might never have been.

## **Holy Land: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Middle East** (color no. 4003)

As the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—three of the world's great monotheistic religions—the Middle East has come to be known as the "Holy Land," yet despite the reverence and awe this region's history inspires, disputes based on long-standing religious claims to the land continue to rend its contemporary fabric.

## **Family Matters: The Role of the Family in the Middle East** (color no. 4004)

Traditionally the model upon which social and political life has been based, the large, extended, and patriarchal Middle Eastern family has begun to fragment under Western influence. Although rapid westernization has benefited many, fundamentalists have tried to save the old society by reviving traditional ways, thus heightening regional tensions.

## **New Frontiers: The Middle East following World War I** (color no. 4005)

The nation-states of the Middle East that today wage war for territory and power did not exist before World War I. By creating artificial frontiers and introducing the alien concept of nationalism, a concept that superseded the traditional Middle Eastern identity based on family and religion, certain Western powers may unknowingly have set the stage for today's conflicts.

## **Captains and Kings: Authority in the Middle East** (color no. 4006)

Compelled by ancient precedents and the tenets of Islam to accept authoritarian rule, Middle Eastern nations (except for Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel, each of which is marred by factionalism and religious strife) have resisted the imposition of Western-style governments and still sanction the military regime or the monarchy.

## **Sects and Violence: Fragmentation within Religions** (color no. 4007)

Although sectarian differences between Jews, Christians, and Muslims are a main ingredient of Middle East tensions, the struggle for power and territory is also rife among divergent sects within each faith who are trying to legitimize their religious beliefs and principles.

## **Ancient and Modern: The Fall and Rise of the Middle East** (color no. 4008)

In this century Middle Eastern independence and oil wealth have reversed the region's downward trend that began, ironically, in the midst of Europe's rebirth. State-of-the-art technology has not, however, replaced tradition; the two coexist in an uneasy alliance.

## **The Story of Oil: Chief Economic Resource of the Middle East** (color no. 4009)

Beneath the sand and rock of the Middle East lie two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves. An object of exploitation since ancient times and a cause of current tension within and without the Middle East, oil has nonetheless brought great wealth—though unequally distributed—to a poor region.

## **Independence: Egypt & Algeria** (color no. 4010)

Between the first and second world wars the Middle East moved from a religious and familial consciousness into one that was national and secular. Triggered in part by the decline of European colonial power, this shift effected the independence of Egypt and Algeria after World War II.

## **Homeland: Israel & Palestine** (color no. 4011)

Promised to both the Arabs and the Jews by the British and partitioned by the United Nations into two states, Palestine, which became the independent State of Israel in 1948, is still the object of a protracted struggle between Israelis and Palestinian nationalists, both of whom maintain ancient claims to the territory.

## **Revolution: Iraq & Iran** (color no. 4012)

Since World War II internal political revolutions in such countries as Iraq and Iran have been a salient feature of Middle East politics. Caused in part by postwar economic instability and the withdrawal of colonial powers, the initial unrest was largely a response to Western exploitation.

## **Change: Turkey & Saudi Arabia** (color no. 4013)

Opposites on an ideological spectrum, Turkey and Saudi Arabia best illustrate how nonviolent change has affected the Middle East since World War I. Saudi Arabia entered the modern age with its Arab, Islamic soul intact; Turkey cast aside its heritage to modernize only to draw opposition from traditionalists over the heavy cost of progress.

## **Identity: Lebanon** (color no. 4014)

The religious and civil dissension that has beset Lebanon since the withdrawal of the French in 1946 began with a national identity crisis. Because the Lebanese embody all the elements that now determine the Middle Eastern identity, their recent history may be read as a history in microcosm of twentieth-century Middle East instability.





## For Discussion

1. How is Lebanon the Middle East in microcosm?
2. Discuss the meaning of the National Pact and its impact on Lebanese politics and society. Why and how did it favor Maronite Christians? What concessions did it make to Lebanese Muslims? Why did the initial harmony stimulated by the National Pact evaporate so quickly?
3. Describe the Sunni Muslim and Maronite Christian perspectives on Lebanon's identity that led to the 1958 civil war. What other factors contributed to the conflict? What did Muslim discontent center on?
4. What was the "Eisenhower Doctrine"? Why did Maronite Christian President Sham'un endorse it and thus request that American troops be dispatched to Lebanon during the 1958 civil war?
5. During the 1960s, why did the Lebanese government refuse citizenship to the Palestinian refugees? How did the plight of the Palestinians further divide Lebanese society?
6. Research the role of the United States in Lebanon since World War II. Was intervention in Lebanon's 1958 civil war ultimately harmful or helpful? Should the United States intervene on behalf of the Palestinians? On behalf of Israel? What is the current U.S. foreign policy regarding Lebanon and the Palestinians? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of intervention and nonintervention.

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